

Australia's library labour market

Phil Teece, Advisor, industrial relations and employment

Australia has almost 10 million employees. The Australian Bureau of Statistics and Department of Employment classify nearly 29 000 as library workers. 13 000 are librarians; 7300 are library assistants; 5000 work as library technicians; and 3500 are archivists or intelligence professionals. Library work is designated a medium-sized occupation.

Librarians are paid relatively well when compared with the workforce as a whole. They earn 119 per cent of the Australian average wage. Library technicians earn 75 per cent.

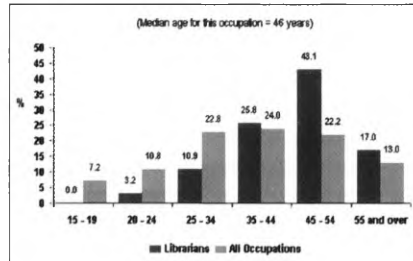
Librarians have an above average proportion of part-time workers among their ranks. Thirty-seven per cent have part-time jobs: only 63 per cent work full time.

Librarians are markedly older than the average for Australian occupations. Sixty per cent are 45 or older, compared to 35 per cent in the total workforce, 86 per cent are 35 or more [55 per cent in the total workforce]. Only 14 per cent are under 35 [42 per cent]. The median age is 46.

Library work is highly feminised. Women make up 89 per cent of employed librarians and more than 97 per cent of library technicians. Among all librarians, about 52 per cent are women working

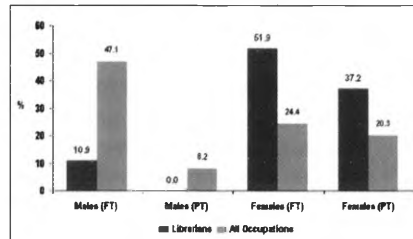
full-time; 37 per cent are women working part-time; full-time men account for nearly 11 per cent. There are very few part-time males.

Age profile: Australian librarians



Source: ABS Labour Force Survey, Australia 2005 (cat. no. 6203.0)

Gender division in the workforce



Source: ABS Labour Force Survey, Australia 2005 (cat. no. 6203.0)

Librarians are spread across a range of industry sectors. Thirty-six per cent work in cultural and recreation services; 24 per cent in education; 17 per cent in government administration and defence; nine per

cent in property and business services; and 5 per cent in health and community services.

Geographically, New South Wales has 41 per cent of the library workforce, Victoria 22 per cent, Queensland 12 per cent, the Australian Capital Territory 6 per cent, Western Australia 9 per cent, South Australia 6 per cent and Tasmania and the Northern Territory each has 2 per cent.

Unemployment among librarians is low at two per cent compared to the Australian average of 5 per cent.

Overall job growth has been positive over the past five years [2 per cent per year], especially in the past two years.

Job prospects are rated 'average' for librarians and library technicians, 'good' for archivists and intelligence professionals, and 'below average' for library assistants [Note that these projections do not include age profiles as a factor in generating job opportunities].

Library workers rank in the seventh decile for 'employment in growth industries'. This means an above-average proportion works in sectors estimated to grow strongly in the foreseeable future. ■

What skills do you need today to get the job you want tomorrow?

Lorraine Bradshaw BLS AALIA, Information Enterprises Australia (IEA)

Finding the right skills base for a job you don't yet have can seem like starting out on a journey without a map and with no idea where you want to go. How do you determine what the right skills base is?

Ask questions! Ask people you know what skills they need to do their job. Don't just ask what courses they did, very often one does not produce the other. Be curious about how they got to where they are now. Don't just ask people whom you feel have 'made it', try to ask people from a wide variety of backgrounds. Just because someone works behind the counter at the local newsagent doesn't mean they don't have a good skills base. Make detailed notes. Once you have the information, compare the jobs and the skills mentioned. Can you determine what job-specific skills are needed? Are these related to the courses people have taken? What about the non-specific job requirements? Are there any recurring qualities?

Armed with this information, take a good look at the jobs on offer. Use online job boards or your local paper to find a job you think you want. Request or download the application package, in particular the selection criteria. This list of essential and desirable criteria have been written to describe the most important skills a person needs in order to do that job. Highlight those that are very job-specific. For example, what qualifications do you need; which software should you be able to use; how many years work experience are required?

Now you have a base for tailoring your formal education and study. If, for instance, you want to work as a legal librarian, you may be able to organise your practicum with a law firm, or offer to do some voluntary work, or obtain a casual or part-time position while you are studying. The experience you gain gives an added dimension to your written work, as you will be able to relate the theoretical knowledge you have to your real world experience. Voluntary or part-time work may also help you decide whether or not you really do want to work in a legal environment.

You will also have a number of generic criteria on your requirements list. Qualities like being able to work on your own and to deadlines, understanding the need for excellence in customer service and working well with other people are extremely important, no matter where you happen to be on the professional ladder, or what job you ultimately want to have. These are core competencies, and most, if not all the jobs that are available today require them. The good news is that they are transferable between jobs and industries. Having these core competencies can be the difference between getting the job that you have always wanted and one that you do just to pay the bills.

Information Enterprises Australia (IEA) is a specialist library and records management recruitment agency, consultants and trainers in Western Australia. <http://www.iea.com.au> Lorraine is the current editor of the Australian Record Retention Manual and is the author of IEA's free monthly e-zine Information Overload.